

Contributions



THE DIVERSITY OF GIFTS

Sermon delivered by J. M. Tombaugh at the opening of conference at Winona Park, 1898 Text: Matt. 25:15. See also I Cor. 12.

As Christian teachers we are not unmindful of the fact that men are not all equal in mental endowment, and we wisely adopt the teaching, both as the matter and manner, to the capacity of those whom we seek to teach. It is the wise preacher who in the preparation of his sermon has regard to the mental acumen of his congregation and then adopts such language and employs such figures and illustrations as will appeal most forcibly to them. But while a recognition of the difference in mental endowment which exist among men should give us some concern and guide us to a judicious presentation of the truths we would teach, yet I think we are much less liable to err in this regard than in our failure to remember that the difference in men with respect to spiritual capacity and acuteness of spiritual discernment are as great as are the differences in mental endowment. Many a good sermon has been spoiled because the preacher studied his sermon and did not study his congregation; and many a faithful pastor has been distressed beyond measure because he could not induce olives to grow on grape-vines. While we admit so readily that there is a difference of intellectual endowment tho the same God, why cannot we adjust ourselves to the other fact that there is also a difference of spiritual endowment tho the same Spirit? I mean a difference in degree rather than in kind. A difference in manifestation, a difference in operation and yet the same Spirit.

Peter the Great of Russia labored in vain to have two clocks to tick in unison and make two pendulums to swing in synchronism, and from his failure he drew the important truth that men as well as clocks, tho they might be very much alike are not exactly so and that it was useless to hope to find in any

two of his subjects exactly the same qualities blended in the same degree. By remembering this truth we too may escape the folly of expecting to find in any two Christians precisely the same manifestations of the Spirit, and we shall escape also the sin of passing censorious judgment upon our brethren whose spiritual graces have not been developed in the same order and to the same degree as our own. The gifts of the Spirit are diverse; they are not bestowed upon all in equal measure. The Word declares that we have gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, and when this truth is taken in connection with the fact that by nature men differ in disposition and temperament, it is no longer a matter for wonder that all men do not have the same religious experience; that the ecstatic joy of one rises no higher in another than a state of calm satisfaction as he contemplates the fact of his pardon. It should occasion no surprise that the religious activity of some of your brethren refuses to follow along identically the same lines that your own fervor carries you. Do not for this reason alone harbor a doubt as to the reality of your brother's conversion. Do not cast him out as unregenerate solely on account of the fact that God has bestowed upon you more richly and abundantly the gifts of the Spirit than in his wisdom it has pleased him to do for your no less sincere and honest brother. God has made a difference among us. Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all are teachers, not all are workers of miracles, not all have gifts of healing, not all speak with tongues, not all interpret, but all these work that one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will. We are exhorted to covet earnestly the best gifts but only that we may thereby give the greater glory to God; that our gifts may not only enable us to offer him a fuller praise, but that they may qualify us to render him a more acceptable and abundant service. The possession of the best gifts is not incompatible with the deepest humility; the possession of the best gifts tends to increase rather than to diminish our charity for others. But, brethren, when God has highly exalted you, when he has bestowed without stint or measure the wonderful, precious gifts of the Spirit, when he has filled you and thrilled you and revealed to you the deep things and the high things of his counsel; when he has given you merciful deliverance and wonderful victory, then beware of the spirit of self-exaltation when you say: "Lord, I thank thee I am not as other men are," when the only difference between you and those with whom you compare yourself is a difference in the degree to which God has granted gifts to you both. Thank him

for his gifts; you can never thank him enough. Praise his holy name that he has deemed you worthy to hold in earthen vessels so much of his glory, but remember that humility is well pleasing to him and that it shines all the brighter when it is set among that brilliant cluster of spiritual graces with which God has endowed you. It is true that the possession of the best gifts is not inconsistent with real humility, for "the noblest are the humblest, the greatest are the simplest," but a fancied superiority may make our religion grotesque and may even lead to sacrilege.

An incident was related to me at the last meeting of our conference which well illustrates this. A religious meeting was being held somewhere in Pennsylvania, and among those present there were no doubt many whom God had highly exalted. One of its speakers who surely did not number the grace of humility among his spiritual gifts, in telling how richly God had blessed him and how the Spirit had filled him, said: "I am as good as the Lord Jesus Christ himself;" and an enthusiastic but evidently a somewhat fanatical admirer answered: "Yes, my brother, you are better for you never stole corn out of the fields." We shudder at the sacrilege of such a speech, but by such extreme things we are warned against the sin of being puffed up, of becoming heavy with spiritual pride when we receive spiritual blessings above our fellows. The diversity of gifts requires watchfulness also against another sin, the sin of envy. You are sensible my dear brother, of a hunger and thirst after righteousness. You covet earnestly the best gifts. You feel not only that the plane of Christian living upon which you walk is not as high as that of some of your brethren, but you are deeply and painfully conscious of the fact that you lack the full development of some of the spiritual graces which adorn their lives to such an eminent degree. Your appreciation of the value of such gifts is so great, your desire to possess the same rich experience of which they tell is so intense, your eagerness to feel the tremulous joy which swells in the heart of your brother becomes sometimes so insistent, and more than all else perhaps the desire to be baptized with the same power which has fallen upon him becomes such a yearning and hungry desire, that sometimes there grows in your heart a little bitterness that it is not so. And maybe by and by out of that will grow a feeling of something akin to envy against your more richly endowed brother.

For myself I can say that I feel no fear of falling into the sin of spiritual pride for I have nothing of which to boast save of the Cross of Christ, but I do confess that if I did not reflect that God has given to each just such spiritual gifts as